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LIFE—NOT DEATH—THE GREAT ARGUMENT FOR RELIGION.

"I shall not die, but live."—PSALM cxviii. 17.

"Godliness is profitable unto all things, HAVING PROMISE OF THE LIFE THAT NOW IS, and of that which is to come."—1 TIM. iv. 8.

PERHAPS the most common argument for religion is, that men must die. We are exhorted to consider our latter end; and to prepare for death. DEATH is the tremendous word which gives emphasis to every appeal.

In our view—as the end of Probation—death may well excite emotions of solemnity. Yet I fear that this mode of speaking, to some minds, may obscure the present necessity of religion. Its sole value is as a preparation for another world. Thus its utility is postponed to the extreme point of life. It is not necessary to us now, except as we are in danger of dying suddenly, and as a prudent man will be insured against the least exposure. But for the present we hold it, not in use, but in reserve. So long as we are in the full tide of life, we need it not. It is only as a provision for a distant futurity. Such is the impression often produced, though it be not intended.

This is a mournful mistake. It is not alone in death that religion has power, but all along through life. And it is as necessary to enable man to live well, as to fit him to die in peace.

From this point of view I mean to plead for religion—drawing arguments—not from the dark domains of death, but from

the most animated scenes of life. Let us behold man—not as he may be in some unknown hereafter, but as he stands before us to-day, in the strifes, difficulties, and temptations of the present hour. Here I find an immediate and pressing demand for religion. Not because men are to die ; but because they live, and must live. Nay, if they were never to die, they would need religion as much as now. As living men, they have duties to discharge, and trials to bear ; and religion alone can enable them to perform the one, or endure the other. Life is forced upon them. They must bear the great burden of existence ; and it is as beings doomed to suffer, and compelled to act, that they need this Celestial Companion, Teacher, and Guide.

Whoever observes the common experience of men, or watches how his own life goes, must feel that the great drawback to every man's happiness is the want of that animating and directing power which religion alone supplies. It is the want of its principle which makes men weak and vacillating. It is the absence of the fear of God which leaves them to rush into endless folly and sin. It is the want of religious faith that permits a whole life to be clouded by misfortune, which the mind cannot rise above.

And from this source flow all human ills, both small and great. Take life's first scene—a family. You can hardly look into a household without being pained by faults of temper, and sources of unhappiness, which Christian love would charm away. Piety, including the trinity of graces—Love, Faith, and Hope, is the foundation of domestic bliss. The sweet charity of the Gospel binds heart to heart. It banishes discord and strife, and all the elements of misery. It teaches brothers and sisters how beautiful it is to sacrifice *their* wishes to make each other happy. Thus it saves a thousand petty jealousies. Every happy family in the world, and every unhappy one, is a living illustration of the value, or of the sad want of religion. It is a social as well as personal necessity.

Again : observe men on the broad theatre of the world, and you discover sin working out its terrible effects in thousands of wretched lives. One is ruined by his ungovernable temper—another by his vices. Religion would save both. Never was a man imprisoned or executed for an act of violence and blood, whom the fear of God would not have kept from committing that act. Religion would have saved him ; but his own passions have destroyed him.

In other minds, not yet polluted by gross passions, nor torn by rage, we see evil principles beginning to work ; or a malignant disposition acting like a slow poison. One is cankered by envy. He hates so much to see the prosperity of a neighbor, that he cannot enjoy his own. Another is bloated with pride and gluttony—a huge mass of selfishness, absolutely rotting for the want

of one active or generous feeling to thrill his body of death. Others have been shrunk and shrivelled by avarice.

Religion counteracts this force of an evil nature. It has a charm to touch even the selfish heart, and to stop the bitterness of the envious and the malignant. Teaching every man to look, not on his own things, but also on the things of others, it enlarges the affections, and ennobles the heart.

At the same time it sets man free from those terrors which false views of the Deity awaken. What millions of minds are so darkened by ignorance, or so tormented by superstition, that they cannot enjoy the life that God has given them! Through fear they are all their lifetime subject to bondage. How many such fears an intelligent religious faith would dispel. What bright views it would impart of the goodness of God. What firm hopes it would inspire! Indeed Christianity is as necessary to the understanding as to the heart. Without faith in a religion that is divine and infallible, it is almost impossible to have any fixed or systematic opinions. Infidel sentiments induce a skeptical habit of mind on all subjects. There is no foundation for a philosophy. Where a man's religion is afloat, his whole mind is afloat.

As the inevitable consequence, such spirits are restless and uneasy. They have no object in life, at least none great enough to be worthy of their ambition. And this is one of the chief miseries of man upon earth—the want of a vast object to keep his faculties employed, and to aggrandize his intellectual and moral being.

Religion alone can thus occupy the mind—giving the widest scope, both to thought, and to the active powers. It assigns to every human being a work on the earth—that of doing good. Thus it keeps his sympathies in constant and healthful action, and prevents the spirit from languishing into indolence, and wasting life in idleness.

But when it has roused the mind, it has another office—to control it; to keep it from rushing into disordered action. For the safe conduct of life, man needs to be pressed by two forces—Stimulus and Restraint. And one must balance the other.

It is so common to speak of Religion as a consoler in sorrow, that an impression is given that its chief value is to be the pillow of sickness, and the last refuge of the unhappy. It is summoned to soothe mental anguish, and to make death easy. Hence strong men feel that it is necessary only for those whose nerves are weak. It is not required in the noon of lusty life, but only for the palsied and trembling old man, sitting in the twilight of age.

Physical strength and hardihood breed self-reliance. Hence it is the boast of men firm in body and in mind that they are competent to govern themselves. The vulgar need religion, but they do not need it. Alas! that extreme confidence is their

greatest danger. Their physical strength is their spiritual weakness. For when the frame stands strong, the hot blood rushes through it like a river. Then the eye flashes fire, and the veins are swollen with passion. Nature is unmanageable. Its impulses will not be restrained. Heroic firmness, which could bear any shock of calamity, is utterly impotent to withstand the violence of passion. If religion be needed to support decrepitude and decay, it is far more so to check the impetuosity of manhood. For that is the period of most rapid and decisive action. Then is the greatest danger of committing mortal sins, and of throwing away life and happiness. At such a moment ordinary rules of virtue are swept away like a light bark on a stormy sea. It needs a stronger power at the helm. It is only the fear of that God who rules in heaven, that can hold the spirit in awe, and keep man from the desperate acts which would drown his soul in guilt and woe.

Nor is this necessity of religion superseded by any natural sagacity or swiftness of thought. It is the error of many active and brilliant intellects, that while the ignorant may require a revelation, their superior intelligence stands in no need of supernatural light.

But it is the high and soaring intellect which requires it most. For if it penetrates farther than other minds, it but ranges round a wider circumference of darkness.

Perhaps of all men he who most needs the light of faith, is the man of genius. His soul is all imagination and sensibility, and is exposed to a far keener suffering than pierces common minds. It is ever on the wing, "wandering through eternity;" exploring the regions of the dead, and conjecturing its own fate hereafter. In these flights it is attacked by doubts and fears to which most are strangers. Gross natures feel only sharp physical pain. They cannot follow the rapid thought of a mind of this ethereal temper, nor understand its intellectual suffering. A torpid nature is protected by its dulness and stupidity. It sleeps by the cataract, while this restless and tortured spirit hovers and screams over the abyss.

Who can tell what the poet Shelley—troubled by those "questionings which haunt the eternal mind"—suffered from perplexity? He had begun by casting off old beliefs; by doubting and denying; and he ended in total scepticism and despair. Such has been the sad result of many an earnest spirit, forever speculating, yet unable to find the truth.

What is the first necessity of such a mind? Is it not faith in God—a glimpse of divine goodness, breaking through the clouds like "the clear shining after rain," and

"Casting on the dark its gracious bow."

This alone relieved the fearful gloom which hung over the spirit of Cowper.

Genius—it is not too much to say—has an affinity to God. In such natures there are mighty instincts which draw them towards the future and the invisible; and wretched indeed is the mind which ranges the universe, and finds no place of rest!

But further—as the intellect is transcendent, its ambition is excited. The mind is “vital in every part.” It is seized with a passionate thirst for glory, and religion is needed to restrain its wildness. Many are the instances in history of great minds intoxicated, and finally maddened, because they had not that self control which religion gives. The action of the brain becomes fearfully rapid. Faster and faster the spirit whirls. The passions flame like a volcano, until the burning mountain crumbles to ashes.

There is a danger to which excitable and ambitious minds are the most exposed. It is that of *INSANITY*. God often punishes intellectual pride with madness. When men of extraordinary talent yield the whole force of their minds to unscrupulous selfishness, the vehemence of their passions not unfrequently overwhelms their intellects. Reason totters on her throne, and the great mind becomes a melancholy wreck.

Against this terrible disaster religion is the best security. It is the great balancing and restoring power of the mind. It moderates ambition. It checks the violence of the will. It soothes the agitated breast. While, by its cheerful and hopeful character, it keeps the spirit from sinking into melancholy—a milder madness. There is a mournful argument for religion, in the vast number of the learned and the powerful who, without it, have perished in their pride. For want of this many of the greatest minds that ever existed have gone to utter ruin.

But if this intellectual catastrophe be averted, still more melancholy is the moral retribution which overtakes such a man. Observe a mind like Voltaire’s—of infinite subtlety and wit—possessing the activity of a disembodied spirit, but prostituting genius to the spread of false and poisonous principles. How perverted becomes the moral nature by this life of evil. The venom is sucked into the blood, and cannot be cast forth.

Awful is the death struggle of such a spirit—proud, daring and defiant. What terrific agony it endures before it goes to judgment. The human mind, when once disordered by a long course of evil, has no power of self recovery. Reason alone saves no man. No matter how lofty the genius, or how vast the knowledge collected in one mind—if that mind breaks away from God, it goes to destruction. If the planet Jupiter once departed from the sun, it would rush to chaos as swiftly as the smallest asteroid that revolves unseen in the heavens. So all life emanates from God, and must revolve around that central sun. A mind that has lost this divine attraction, and begins to waver in its orbit, will drop from heaven like a falling star. Then the relics of the majestic intellect only make more vivid the impending ruin—

like the lights of a ship, that flash on dark and angry waves, and show that she is hopelessly in the power of the storm.

Proud Philosophy! How many hast thou destroyed whom religion would have saved. The learned infidel may laugh at the poor cottager who walks by faith, and morning and evening directs his prayer to Heaven. But that poor man, with his simple piety, is more likely to be truly happy, to be kept from daring sins, and to be saved in the great day of judgment, than the man of science with all his philosophy. Genius has left a million wrecks upon the shore of time. But religion—not one. Where is the man whom religion has undone? What mind has it shattered? What heart has it broken? Christianity has no such ruined beings to answer for. The grace of God infallibly brings salvation!

But—if no such fearful danger impended over the too violent or misdirected action of the mind—still it is easy to perceive that sin destroys the chaste beauty of the soul, and robs the character of an indefinable grace. It makes the motives low and selfish, and even renders the range of thought narrow and limited. It gives to the whole mind a sordid and petty character. Even talent is sure to breed conceit, and to make its possessor pretentious and absurd.

On the other hand, religion, united to genius, imparts to it a spiritual and angelic beauty. It preserves the great from the intoxication of power. It teaches the exalted how to wear their honors with humility.

Then what majesty it gives to the whole man. "Religion," says Daniel Webster, "is an indispensable element in every great human character." True, there have been men of vast capacity—men forcible in action—that had not a thought of religion. But I do not believe that all the ages of human history ever produced a truly sublime character without this divine inspiration. Approach these heroes of the world, and you always find in them something coarse and low. Religion alone is the inspirer of greatness. It unchains man from the earth. Prometheus is unbound. The soul is led away from itself—away into infinity—"beyond the solar walk or milky way." Thus religion feeds the intellect with vast conceptions, and the heart with noble examples. It inspires enthusiasm for that which is great and holy. Thus it multiplies resplendent instances of virtue from generation to generation.

Religion then is the great want of all men—of the learned, as well as the ignorant—of the mighty as well as the weak. Every class in society has its peculiar want of it. The poor need it, to keep them from being envious; and the rich, to keep them from being proud. The wretched need it to cheer their sad lot; and the great, to moderate their ambition. It raises the miserable out of the dust, and keeps the favored of Fortune from plunging to perdition. All then alike need religion as their preserver.

All have duties to perform, and temptations to resist. All will find trials in their course through life, which it alone can make supportable.

Why then virtually postpone religion by telling men that they need it to prepare for death? as if they had no use for it until they reached that gloomy shore. This mode of speaking comes from a false idea of religion, as if it were something apart from man himself, and which could be applied to him like extreme unction at the last moment of life. But no—religion is an internal principle—or rather it includes all right principles. It is therefore the regulator of all man's judgment, passions and will—bringing them into harmony with truth and reason.

And is this a thing which can be postponed? Can peace, patience and mercy be deferred? Are a spirit of love and a principle of duty, virtues which it is as well to have years hence as now? Nay, can life go on at all as it ought without these primary conditions of well-being? It cannot be. No—not for an hour. If I delay one hour, then that is an hour lost. If I defer it till to-morrow, then I am deferring so long my happiness. Then I am doomed to pass one more day of misery. Its sorrows I must bear alone. If I have tears to shed, I shall find no comforter. And can I afford to lose even one day of existence? Are my days so many that I can afford to drag on one after another in weariness and pain.

Thus we attach a value to every passing hour. I acknowledge no pre-eminence of the day of one's death over an ordinary day of life. I cannot understand that religion should be more important at one period than at another; at the hour of dissolution than at this moment. If man's happiness depend on the proper government of his mind, that government is as necessary now as at any future period of existence. I admit that there are certain crises of life—moments of agony, in which ages of suffering are concentrated into an hour; and when the absence of this great consolation may be felt most bitterly. So it may be when the memories and reproaches of a life misspent, rush upon the dying soul.

The moment of death too is unspeakably solemn as the limit of opportunity—the last light of day.

But beyond that I see not that religion is more important at the hour of death than at this hour. *Now, and always, and everywhere*, it is the great necessity of man.

We see then that the chief argument for religion is, not coming death, but actual life. We need no spectre of a King of Terrors to warn us against taking guilt upon our souls, while these breasts palpitate with a life which guilt may render more terrible than death.

Nay, more. We need not send forward our imagination into a dark eternity to derive additional horrors from that tremendous gloom. Why repeat so often the lamentations of hell, as if

here on earth we did not hear weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth? Is there not misery here as well as there?

We will not cross the boundary of this world in search of terrors. Before our eyes is suffering enough to affright us from evil. There is no end to the misery of man. All round the earth comes the wail of millions—lamenting, cursing, and despairing. Yea, in our own breasts has been felt that mortal agony which makes the place of future punishment so fearful. We have already tasted the bitterness of death. Whoever has felt remorse—he knows what hell is. REMORSE—that word of which a dying statesman said, men knew not the meaning—who has not felt its sting? When in a moment of passion we have given way to a burst of fury, venting our rage in a torrent of bitter words, or doing some cruel, but irrevocable act—then comes a reaction. Then arise shame and self-reproach. Then drop the bitter, burning tears. I suppose that every man of sensibility has at times suffered a mental anguish, which, were it perpetual, would lead him to say, It is better for me to die than to live.

All that anguish religion would have prevented. And if we have it now, it will avert such agonies a thousand times hereafter. It is not therefore merely to save your souls in a distant futurity—but to save them now—to deliver them from innumerable woes—that we fly to this great source of strength and of peace.

Why should I defer this great necessity of my being? No—not to-morrow, but to-day. I am not willing to suffer one hour of wretchedness which religion would prevent.

Nor would I lose the present happiness it confers. For it is not in heaven alone that it blesses the soul. It has promise of the life that now is as well as of that which is to come. It makes happy beings here as well as there. Religion deepens joy, causing every current of gladness to rush through the heart in a fuller stream. It takes away the feverishness of ordinary pleasure, and breathes over the spirit a holy calm. There is a peculiar countenance which I have never seen but in religious men. It is full of sensibility and benevolence. But its chief expression is Peace. No one can look into such a face, and not be fascinated by it. There is a clearness and depth in the eye, as of a lake with no dark and troubled currents beneath. And what meaning in its smile! That gentle radiation of the features passes over the placid countenance like a breath of air, rippling still and tranquil waters. This is the very spirit of the skies, and it bears light and joy wherever it is wafted over the earth.

If this train of thought be just, then the manner in which Death is often presented as an argument for religion, has no force in it. A prominence is given to that event, as if it were not merely a change of existence, but life's final and overwhelming

catastrophe. And indeed it is to be feared, that, though not avowed, such an apprehension creeps into the thoughts, and that good men reason for religion with infidel arguments.

But what is death? Is it a pause of life—a rest of the soul until the resurrection—until the ages of human history shall be complete? Then it is not to be feared. For it suffers nothing. It is still and voiceless. It utters no sound. It feels no pain. How much more fearful is this trembling, throbbing life which now has hold of us. That quivers like a reed shaken by the wind. Not a breath blows upon it but makes it tremble with joy or grief. The chambers of death are silent. All is tranquillity and peace. But the halls of life ring with shouts of conflict—with bursts of passion and of tears. The dead weep no more. The only tears that water the grave, are shed by the living as they stand over the silent dust. Indeed, if death were but a long sleep, we might welcome him as an aged friend, who comes to take us to rest in his arms.

In that slumber and repose there is nothing to be afraid of. The mere departing from the world has in it no terror, except as whatever is enveloped with mystery excites a vague dread. In such cases we fear though we know not what we fear. But mere dissolution has neither joy nor pain. It furnishes no argument for religion. Indeed it proves nothing one way or the other.

But some think to make us start back by describing death as attended with circumstances of physical horror. Certain minds delight to awaken terror, and they labor to collect around death every gloomy image. They love to harrow the feelings of those who hear them by speaking in sepulchral tones of the corpse, and the winding-sheet, and the clod falling on the coffin.

There is a connection in which these images of man's mortality may teach a useful lesson. For example, when we speak of the insignificance of human glory—of the nothingness of earthly grandeur—it is most instructive to point the proud spirit to the hour, when all its greatness will be brought down to darkness and the worm. Then do we find a solemn monitor in graves and tombs. Let not man dream of immortality—he, whose end is destruction—who will soon be given back to the earth—"ashes to ashes, dust to dust."

But when the object is to excite a shudder by presenting to the mind loathsome images of decay—by telling us that our bodies shall be food for worms—it is a vulgar artifice, which can affect only the nervous and the timid. In death, thus viewed, there is nothing truly terrible.

Here is a confusion of ideas, which need to be separated. Men speak of the "cold grave." But what is cold or heat, where there is no sensation? What means "the dark and narrow tomb," if no eye is opened to discern the absence of light? Truly, it is no more dark, than if the dead were laid, as they are, among some tribes of Indians—in the tops of trees. By thus

analyzing our emotions, we find that insensibly we have associated the idea of consciousness with the body turning to corruption. The loneliness of the sepulchre is dreadful, because we fancy that the mind is wakeful. We picture to ourselves the dead man rising up in his grave-clothes, and casting his cold eye around his dark and solitary cell. Therefore, we shudder to be buried, because we cannot divest ourselves of a vague fear of being buried alive! Take away this, and there is nothing more to dread. If life be departed—or dormant—then there is nothing more painful in the prospect that the body of a man should be left in the ground than the root of a tree. Indeed one of our poets, in his *Thanatopsis*, has made pleasing the idea of thus "mingling with the elements."

Nay, if death be not merely a sleep for ages, but a sleep **FOREVER**, that is not the most dreadful thought which can weigh down the mind. Those who argue for the immortality of man from his desire of life, perhaps exaggerate his dread of annihilation. A celebrated preacher exclaims in a burst of powerful language: "O death! dark hour to hopeless unbelief! hour to which, in that creed of despair, no hour shall succeed! being's last hour! *to which even the shadows of avenging retribution were brightness and relief!*"

Such may be the natural instinct. But this love of existence is sadly changed by misery and by guilt. When life can but perpetuate bitter memories, the wretched rush from it,

"Mad from life's history,
Glad to death's mystery,
Swift to be hurled,
Any where, any where,
Out of the world." *

And not alone the desolate and broken hearted. But those who have tried every pleasure of life, and exhausted them all, turn to death as a new excitement, and fondly dream of wandering as shades on "the black, Plutonian shore," inhaling "the freshness of the eternal night."

Even though their spirits pass through darkness into naught, they feel little horror of the change. Many a sceptic, and Epicurean, looks forward to a final and utter cessation of existence with no trembling. Nay, it would seem as if he counted upon it as a last triumph to die without pain. He anticipates coolly the sensation of dying, and imagines himself falling into a soft slumber, as after a weary day—the senses gradually closing, and a feeling of repose stealing over him, delicious as the opium-eater's dream,—and thus slowly sinking down into total unconsciousness—a rest, which the hopes and fears of existence shall vex nevermore!

Strange that this "utter end," desired alike by misery and by

* Hood's "Bridge of Sighs."

wearied pleasure, should sometimes be demanded even by ambition.

A daring spirit, that has climbed to the summit of glory, feels a wild excitement in the prospect of bursting into the vacant heavens, leaving men to gaze after it in wonder. Danton—sentenced to the scaffold in the full vigor of life, exulted in this tragical end of his career:—"I shall soon be with annihilation; but my name will live in the Pantheon of history."

When Mirabeau was dying, the energies of his Herculean frame long struggled with the mortal disease. He had extorted a promise from his physician, that, when the agonies of death became excruciating, he would give him opium. Still the mighty heart beat on. He said that he felt a hundred years of life throbbing in him. At length he ceased to speak. Then his eye sought the physician, and seemed to implore the fatal draught. He took a pencil, and traced one word, *dormir*. To sleep—sleep—sleep—was the last prayer of the dying tribune. He wished to sleep for an eternity!

It is not then the silence and forgetfulness of death that men fear most. To the "aching head" it is a welcome hope,

"To slumber in that dreamless bed
From all its toil."

But they fear that they shall not slumber. "To sleep—perchance to dream." It is the waking moments that they dread—when the tide of life flows back into the soul—when the dreaminess of departing is over, and they find themselves awake, where they can no more sleep, nor die. Then will they know, that if it was a fearful thing once to die—it is infinitely more terrible to live, without a possibility of death.

Even the gloomy expectation of Danton is disappointed. Ambition cannot soar so high as to pass the bounds of existence. To misery God promises no *such* relief. Nor to the wicked does he grant permission thus to escape forever. No darkness of eternity covers them with its friendly gloom.

Nor are the good man's hopes destined to be lost in the shadow of death. He is not born to die. When his soul departs out of the body, it does not sink into a dark cloud and disappear. It mounts to a higher state.

If therefore we look *beyond* death, it is still life—life forever—which alone is to be hoped or feared. It is not the cessation of being, but its continuance, that appals us. Not that the body will decay—but that there is in man a principle which resists decay. Not that we shall be soon dead and gone. But that in some other region our spirits will live. This necessity of life—this impossibility of annihilation, awakes deadly fear. And it is this which makes religion so immensely important, because that teaches us how to live. The effect of moral action clings to us

with the tenacity of life. It is not the immediate suffering which follows one wrong act which makes its commission so bitter. But one transgression is the forerunner of a thousand. These airy motions of the will soon harden into habits. Evil passions grow too strong to be resisted. Therefore must they be checked in the beginning, and a firm principle of religion be implanted. For a mind that has no sense of religious obligation, and no principle of obedience, has lost the main element of self-control, and must go on to sin and to inflict pain upon itself.

With such elements of misery infixed in the very being, what more terrible prospect can be offered than simple existence? Will it not be enough that the heart must beat on forever, when every throb is agony?

Some tell us that men are punished as they go along, and therefore that they cannot be punished in a future world. I admit the premise, but deny totally the conclusion. True, men do suffer bitterly for their evil deeds in this life. But so far from that being an evidence that they will not suffer still hereafter, it is the strongest presumption of future misery. For sin against God, and duty, and conscience, is not like a civil offence, which is punished by imprisonment, and which can claim no more when the term of the penalty expires. It is rather a poisoning of man's whole nature—a deadly venom, working in the blood and brain—and which must cause suffering as long as it remains in the system—even if that be forever! Because I see that every wrong act causes man either bodily or mental suffering, I am certain that, when habits of wickedness have been confirmed by seventy years of sinful life, they must produce complete and uninterrupted misery.

Others, in despair, have sought refuge under the very threatenings of the Bible, and hoped that by eternal death God intended annihilation—that the wicked should be eternally dead. But no, life remains, whether the great hope of eternity be lost or won. The Scriptures assure us that a time will come when death shall be destroyed, and forevermore unknown. But to the irreclaimably bad and lost, life will be no boon. They will long to die, and their supreme misery will be that they cannot expire.

Here then I rest my argument for religion. It is not because you are to die, but because you live, and must live, and religion alone can save you from infinite misery here and hereafter.

I say not, you must be religious because life is short, and death is near. Alas! life may be very long—too long for your happiness. Death may be far distant. And before you reach that bourne, you may have to traverse years of suffering that shall seem like so many slow moving centuries. Therefore, do you need religion—not for a dying hour—but here—and now. Take to your bosom that celestial Comforter. It will mitigate every human sorrow. It will break the force of those inevitable calamities, which must fall even upon prosperous life, so that they shall

not crush you. It will revive your courage and hope. It will keep you from being your own worst enemy, and destroying yourself by madness and by crime. It will save you from endless folly and wretchedness. It will avert from you hours of weeping and of remorse. It will prepare you both to live and to die.

Yes—to die! For I mean not that your minds should be barred against all thought of death. Only that it be not clothed with false and unreal terrors; and thus made an object of unmanly fear. Bodily dissolution is a matter neither of hope or dread. What is it but to cease to breathe, and to turn to dust?

I look into the caverns of Death, and find nothing there half so wonderful or terrible as I meet in the broad light of day. Men speak of the awful mystery and solemnity of death. Would that they might ponder the more awful mystery of Life. This fact of a vital existence is the great wonder of creation. The highest act of God was not the moulding of external forms, but the inspiration of an independent life. We can imagine how the cold clay should be fashioned into the grace of a statue. But how life should enter into dead bodies—this is Nature's miracle. "God breathed into man the breath of life, and he became a living soul."

To live! What is it? It is to think, to feel, to suffer, to enjoy. Whatever of good or ill man can experience, is concentrated in that one word—Life. This is the most intense word in human language. So that when the Scriptures describe the completion of glory and blessedness, they speak of the heavenly state, not as everlasting happiness, but as everlasting life. Life then is the chief interest of man, and death itself becomes important only as introducing another life which is endless.

This is the true light in which to look upon death—not as the enemy of life, and its destroyer—but as its new creator—as a further development of the vital power, by which the soul, casting off its cumbrous clay, is born into immortality. As such, we would not relinquish the hope of death. It is a transformation too great—too magnificent—not to be welcomed as our supreme felicity. Life is no longer weighed down by a dark and dreadful fear. The heart is not oppressed and stifled by a dreary feeling of decay. To the last moment the pulse beats firm and high. As death approaches it throbs quicker with expectation. Life rides exulting and triumphant over every obstacle. It spans the arch of death, and urges its way upward forever. Glorious Death! Thou art not the end of life, but its fresh beginning. Eagerly we look for the moment when God's silent angel shall open the doors of eternity! We love to meditate that coming day, and—while we rejoice in all the good of this passing life—shall often turn aside to

"Walk thoughtful on the solemn, silent shore
Of that vast ocean we must sail so soon."

SERMON DCI.

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"AND THE BOOKS WERE OPENED."

"And the books were opened; and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the book, according to their works."—REV. xx. 12.

The present bears a most intimate relation to the future. And whether we believe it or not, there is a record of all our past which will hereafter be opened before us, and according to its registrations our eternal destiny will be fixed. The thought of to-day will meet us again; and the deed which was done in presence of few if any witnesses, will be read out before the audience of an assembled universe. So revelation teaches; so we believe. But there are many who think the threatened judgment a priestly device or ghostly bugbear, and in no wise to be feared. Scoffers ridicule the idea, and men of mere worldly views, if they think at all concerning the matter, are quite too ready to indulge the hope, that either the judgment tribunal will not be set, or if set, will not possess those tremendous adjuncts of justice and holiness, which the Sacred Oracles ascribe to it. And even within the pale of the church, there is an appalling amount of mere speculation respecting the great day of the Lord. And being little if any thing more than speculation, the doctrine of eternal judgment does not exert that practical control over the life, which a doctrine of so intrinsic an importance ought most surely to exert upon us all. To revivify our decaying impressions quicken our faith, and deeply impress us with a conviction of the certainty of the coming scene in which we shall all share a glad or sorrowful part, will be the object of the present discourse. We proceed to inquire what are the books which will be opened.

I. The book of the *Material Universe* will be opened.

The connection between mind and matter is most intimate—and the most meagre attainments in the merest elements and rudiments of science familiarize us with the fact, that mind is the controlling and plastic power which rules over and impresses

matter to a wonderful extent. It is indeed the boast of modern achievement, that spirit, by its inventive skill, has subdued nature, and rendered the elements of matter subservient to its purposes. And while this is a thing of common and open notoriety, there are relationships between mind and matter of a nature far more astounding, than all those included within the ordinary range of scientific and mechanic art. There are relationships and points of contact between the thinking soul and the world of matter, which, instead of flattering our pride of intellect, may well awe our hearts, and fill us with holy fear. We say only, what the best teachers of natural science declare, when we aver that the outward world is a depository of the moral doings of each accountable man. Nature is the great ledger, on whose sheets a recording angel traces a record of our every thought and act. The air we breathe, the light which enwraps us, and the dull clod we press in the daily rounds of our business, are so many scribes, taking note of all our movements, and recording all our works. The heavens which surround us are the parchment scroll on which God's telegraphic agencies are ever tracing the symbolic characters that delineate our lives. This is not fancy, but the demonstrative testimony of the most exact and rigid science. In proof we advert to a few familiar illustrations.

We are accustomed to speak of matter as dead, inert, unfeeling. But the fact is, it is ever in motion, and always impressible. Every particle entering into the composition of the material world, is so nicely adjusted to every other particle, as to preserve its balance, while it ceaselessly vibrates. And while thus vibrating, every kind of matter—the granite rock as well as the yielding clay—are all busy in receiving impressions, just as wax takes and retains the image stamped upon it. Thus all the pages of nature are adapted to receive the image of our words and works.

From this general, to proceed to more specific illustrations. Take the atmosphere. This is a fluid ocean—raising its waves and its ripples, similar to those which are visible on an ocean of waters. When you cast a stone into a sea or a lake, you set in motion a series of concentric circles, which recede farther and farther from the place of disturbance, until they finally become invisible. But, if when the naked eye loses the power of tracing them, it were assisted by a powerful magnifying glass, they would still be discerned rolling on. And if when the eye and the glass together should fail to follow them, recourse should be had to the searching analysis of mathematical investigation, it would be found that beyond a peradventure, they still continued to widen and widen, coming in contact with other circles originating from other centres, modified by them and modifying them in return; yet never losing their motion but entering into the permanent movements and forces which fill up the universe.

This is indeed a mystery, but no less a fact ; and none but the illiterate or the sciolist will deny it. As this is true of impressions made on water, so also is it of impressions made on air. Our words, which are the outward flows of invisible thought, and every act, set in motion a series of waves, just as surely as do the vibrations of a bell when struck ; and these waves enter into the permanent movements of the atmosphere ; and are all preserved there and will be preserved until the heavens shall flee away. It argues nothing against this fact, that these waves become invisible or inaudible to us—for our perceptions are not the limits of material existence. If it be objected that the impressions produced upon the atmosphere may become infinitely minute, I answer that this minuteness will be no hindrance to their being read by Him, whose infinity embraces the minute as well as the vast.

In like manner we might go on to show that the unfeeling earth preserves, amid all the vibrations of its countless atoms, the record of human action. So that the lonely spot where the murderer dashed down his victim—the darkened cave, where persecution tracked his martyr, and the dungeon's wall where suffering virtue bowed the head in agony—are as so many memorial-stones, whereon man's acts are engraven, as with the pen of a diamond ; and there is no deed of man, whether done in the day or in the night, of which the insensible particles of earth are not the witnesses and the recording angels.

To confirm these illustrations and establish the general fact, we may avail ourselves of the aid which the nature and properties of light afford, in proof of a natural record of human transactions. I need not tell you that there is a light-bearing ether—a luminous fluid—diffused through all space and penetrating all bodies, however dense. The sun and the stars, singly, do not produce light. This is generated by the chemical and electrical power of the heavenly bodies, working upon, and in connection with, this light-bearing ether. The sun puts in motion this fluid, so that light comes to us in waves. Now, if the sun be regarded as one, and the earth as another shore of an ocean, one hundred and ninety-five millions of miles across, then the wave on the opposite shore must impel a succession of waves, infinitely minute, through all the intervening space, until the last wave reaches the eye of the observer. The rapidity of these undulations or waves is so great, that only eight minutes of time are required for the delivery of an impression, made at the distance of 195,000,000 miles, to the eye of a spectator on our earth. Two august and imposing facts here meet us and compel our attention. Here is a medium of transmission as widely diffused as the universe ; all impressions made on it are conveyed with a rapidity inconceivable. And this everywhere present ether becomes the means of daguerreotyping the forms of human transactions upon the tablets of nature. This earth may be regarded as a

mighty cylindrical press, with men for its types, and whose every revolution impresses upon the broad sheets of light that envelope it, the nature and character of each day's doings—of every man's work—yea, printing all upon a sheet which may be read almost instantaneously in the remotest regions of space. There is another thought in connection with this, which we ought not to omit.

It is known that a message forwarded by telegraph from New York to New Orleans, would, if the point of connection were formed, travel in about the same space of time from New York to Pekin—and will you tell me wherein the rapidity of electrical transmission on Morse's telegraph differs from the rate of transmission on God's telegraph? For the light which surrounds us is a divine telegraph, along whose lines the report of all our works is carried with a celerity surpassing thought. The work I do in secret, therefore, is published, as soon as done, in far off worlds. He who created the light reads its report; and may not spirits, good and bad, do the same?

Startling thought! That nature is everywhere present, witness and reporter of our works—that the spirits above and the spirits beneath are summoned to take knowledge of us! There is indeed "nothing hid which shall not be made manifest." When the day shall blaze for the revelation of all our doings, earth, air and sky shall disclose all that we have written and graven upon them—whether of word or deed—virtuous or vicious. This is to me a thought of the soberest and weightiest practical moment. It is a grand and imposing aspect which nature presents in her ceaseless activity. When we consider how busy are all her elements—how air, earth and sky are working in wondrous combination—that all are taking signs and impressions that will never be erased until the great day, it may well admonish us to beware indulging the hope that anything can be said or done beyond the observation of witnesses ever with us.

Lest some may set all this down to the score of fancy, I ask these plain questions.—Does not the geologist read on the rocks and in the fossils of bygone centuries the record of events which occurred long ere Adam breathed the air of paradise? Are there not now vibrations on the surface of the earth which sometimes startle whole communities? Does not the breeze carry on its wings tidings of things done far away from the reach of our vision? Is not light a swift-winged messenger to bear to us report of occurrences in far distant regions of space? And if all nature is thus occupied in bringing intelligence to us, is it fancy and not rather the demonstration of experience as well as of science, that nature is also occupied in bearing intelligence of us—that her every whisper, however faint, and her every sign, however obscure, can be read by Him who holds the universe in his hand and counteth the number of its atoms, is what we dare not doubt, if we believe in a God of infinite knowledge.

It was therefore no flourish of rhetoric, when the inspired Isaiah appealed to the heavens and the earth to bear testimony to the sins of Israel.

Let not the sinner think that his sins will be buried in oblivion. The darkness and the light are both alike to Him who, as well as thousand years hence, as at this moment, can read on the broad pages of the visible universe, the inscriptions graven there by our works and our words.

II. The book of *Human Consciousness* will be opened.

The human soul is not only a laboratory of thought—it is also a great storehouse, wherein are deposited its thoughts, emotions and volitions. Without material locks or bars it has a power of retention that far surpasses our conception. It is the inspector of its own contents—the inquisitor of its own state. This is indeed what we understand by consciousness—the knowledge of our own mental sensations and operations—the internal perception of self. Consciousness takes knowledge of what is constantly passing within, and memory stores up these impressions for the future. Memory is the broad page on which consciousness is ever writing the narrative of a soul's daily and hourly history. And this self-observing faculty of the mind acts as the guardian and interpreter of the memory. In our eager pursuit of pleasure or wealth, we try to forget the past, yet often before our astonished vision, sins perhaps long ago committed, start up as fresh as though of yesterday.

No faculty of soul is more certain in its action, than this power of perpetuating and retaining the past. Much we forget, and often regret that our memories are feeble, and our knowledge of past events dimmed. Yet vivid realizations of the past are greatly hindered by our want of effort, and by our endeavors to erase the inscriptions of past feelings and events. Yet slight causes will "bring back on the heart the weight which it would fling aside forever." And contrary to our wishes the dead past stands up before us. This power of recollection and involuntary consciousness is a matter of each man's experience.

There are times when memory seems roused to an unwonted energy—when consciousness, like the lightning's flash on a dark night, illumines with a most intense vividness the whole field of our moral history. The chambers of imagery, long veiled, are suddenly opened. Old thoughts and old schemes are brought glaringly to view.—Many now before me can attest the truth of this. The standing by a death couch, or the look into an open grave, or the hearing of a sermon from a faithful pastor, or a calm reproof from the lips of a parent—yea, even the rustling of a dead and withered leaf, may have been the means of recalling reflections and emotions long faded from recollection. Numerous are the well authenticated records of dying hours in which

the believing and the impenitent have found themselves confronted with scenes and mental acts that had long been forgotten. Death, like a mighty magician, brings these together and arrays them with terrible distinctness before the quickened senses of the departing spirit.

And why should we doubt that when the clog and clod of sense are dropped, that this consciousness of self will be vastly intensified. Little as we know of the world on the other side death, yet of this, reason and revelation both assure us—that there "we shall know, even as we are known."

There, the book of self will be opened. Partly through the craft of Satan, and partly on account of our own wilful obstinacy, self is now little understood, because little studied; or if studied, the work is conducted in such a spirit that we too often rise from our investigations, complacently self-deceived. But when the archangel's trump shall sound, each individual, instead of viewing, as now, the faults and crimes of others, will be summoned to contemplate "all that his thinking soul hath thought, for glory or for shame."

III. The book of *Divine Remembrance* will be opened.

Though nature fail, and consciousness be infirm, there is a being whose knowledge is infinite—by whom actions are weighed. Should creation's records be dimmed or effaced, there is nevertheless a record everlastingly vivid and immutably true—His mind—to whom the darkness and the light are alike; who penetrates every disguise; who beholds at once the entireness of his universe, as also the parts which compose it.

Such knowledge is too wonderful for our comprehension.

"Thou God seest me," said one of old, whose soul was deeply impressed with a sense of the divine presence! And he uttered a truth no less awful than it is certain.

We shrink from publicity when we would plan or act contrary to conscience. We desire not the presence of human witnesses to our guilt, either in thought or action. Crime courts concealment. Sin shuns the light of day. When the wicked act is done, the sinner endeavors to quiet his conscience, by the flattering unction that no man knoweth it. But in all these calculations of concealment one fact is overlooked and forgotten, viz., there is an ever present, an all beholding spirit—an eye whose lightning glance penetrates every concealment—which discerns all the thoughts and intents of the heart.

The divine knowledge never faileth. To the memory of the Infinite, the unchangeable God, there pertaineth no imperfection. All the acts of our intelligent being are treasured up in his recollection. The plans, thoughts, words, acts of our whole life—all that has entered into the composition of our moral history—however much may have escaped our memory—all is deposited

in the treasury of God's knowledge. "The ways of man are before the eyes of the Lord, and He pondereth all his goings." "Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him? saith the Lord." "All things are naked and open unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do."

Every thing relating to our individual characters will be brought to light. "For the Lord will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts." Aye, even the "*counsels of the hearts.*"

THE EVERLASTING REST.

"There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God."—HEB. ix. 4.

Heaven is never presented to our view as a state of conflict. Having passed through his period of trial, the Christian will enter the world of holiness and bliss, never again to be subjected to the loss of his peace. Secured from falling, by an Almighty arm, there is no danger that he will ever apostatize. He will love and serve God in full accordance with his capacities; and he will evermore be surrounded by beings of the same character with himself. There will be no sinful propensities in his soul, struggling for the mastery; no consciousness of transgression; no painful regret for past errors; nothing of this nature to interrupt and destroy his peace. All the woes incident to our fallen, sinful nature will be excluded from the heavenly rest. The fear of poverty will not disquiet the mind, nor that of want oppress; the jealousies and envies of earth will there be unknown; nor can we think of any evil to which we are here subject, from which the Christian will not there be free; and, with his holiness, his bliss will then be perfect.

The employments of heaven will be such as to increase and perfect his joy. We reason from the nature of the mind, and its capacity for the acquisition of knowledge, that in heaven it will still be active; and it will make the study of the works of God a chief employment, and be engaged, with the angels, in all that conduces to the divine glory and its own happiness. Here, the body occupies a large proportion of care. But in the future state, all its wants will be provided for, so that our whole time may be actively devoted to serving God, in such rational and pleasurable pursuits, as may conduce to his glory and our good.

The ideas common on this subject are strangely wrong, contradicting everything that we know of the nature of celestial feli-

city and glory. It is not in idleness that the saints are to spend eternity. There must, and will be something for them to do, which will call into activity their holy and benevolent affections, or else heaven would soon become a dull place to them. Nor can we doubt that, in this respect, there is ample provision made. Heavenly happiness is represented by symbols drawn from material objects of beauty and grandeur. We are not to suppose that heaven presents to view a beautiful garden filled with choice fruit, or a crystal stream, or a city paved with gold; nor that there are in heaven harps of gold, and crowns and raiment pure and white; nor that our Father has a house there, and tables spread for the hungry, for these are only emblems, and are used to convey the idea of happiness to minds otherwise incapable of its conception. We should not therefore materialize heaven, but use these scriptural metaphors to heighten our ideas of its bliss.

There will be both pleasant and useful occupation in which the saints will be engaged. It is needless, however, to speculate, where the facts have not been revealed. And yet it is pleasant to think that there are innumerable ways of occupying ourselves in heaven. There is much yet to be learned of God, and of his works. Here, we gain only the rudiments of knowledge. Even Newton, at the close of life, could say, that he appeared to himself to have been like a little boy upon the seashore, picking up a smoother pebble and a prettier shell than ordinary, while the vast ocean of truth lay unexplored before him.

When we reflect that the whole of the boundless creation will in heaven be spread out to our view, that suns and systems of worlds will rise upon the astonished vision, and that new works of creation, new forms of matter, and fresh creations of mind, may occupy us with a view of Jehovah's wisdom for ever, we may feel assured that, to follow in the path which he thus opens before us, will give us enough to do, and even inspire us with fresh motives to adoration and praise.

Social friendship will there be enjoyed and perpetuated. Much of the pleasure of life is that derived from social intercourse. But, in heaven, this communion will be purely spiritual. As kindred minds naturally take pleasure in each other's society, so will it be in the everlasting rest. That the saints in heaven will there recognize their friends, does not admit of a doubt. There we shall see as we are seen, and know as we are known. It greatly enhances the pleasure of anticipation to reflect, that the friendships begun on earth may be transferred to heaven, and there be perpetuated. No thought suggested in view of friends who sleep in Jesus, is more consoling. We know that they will be happy, and that abiding faithful, we shall join them in that kingdom of our Father. There is nothing which so effectually removes the sting of death, or imparts such consolations.

tion to the bereaved, as the thought that those we knew and loved on earth, and who have gone before us, may be deputed, by our Saviour, as ministering spirits, to convoy us home; so that, on dying, our eyes may be open, in eternity, on the friends who surround our dying bed, waiting to receive, and to welcome us to glory.

Does the parent rejoice in the return of a wandering son? How much higher, and holier, the joy of that parent in heaven, to meet his beloved child there, well knowing that every danger is now past, and that everlasting blessedness is, through sovereign grace, secured? The spirits of our friends in heaven are, as the angels of God, enjoying the same interest in each other, and ever susceptible to the same holy friendships. When it is reflected how greatly the happiness of life depends on such pleasant associations, can we doubt that the pleasures derived from this source are, in heaven, infinitely enhanced? Not only those we knew and loved on earth, but holy persons of past ages, will share our love. Beings of a higher grade will constitute part of the celestial society. The saints will mingle with the angels, partake of their knowledge, listen to their wisdom, and rejoice in their love.

But above all, the saints will there hold converse with God, and enjoy the blessedness resulting from communion, and intercourse with the Redeemer. They will feel a conscious joy in the thought, that the great and good Father, who sits upon the throne of the universe, is their friend.

What can equal such society, or confer such happiness? Friendships so exalted and glorious, formed on such a basis, and cemented by such relationships, will furnish every thing needed to make us happy.

And the happiness thus created for the blest will never terminate. The saints will have found the everlasting rest. Earth presents to view no such blessedness. In comparison with this, all its pleasures are trivial; its joys are transitory—here to-day—to-morrow—gone. Its friendships are often withered in an hour. All the pleasures that spring from earth bear the stamp of their earthly origin. But the rest of the saints is a state of blissful employment, and social intercourse and friendship, pure, spiritual, and eternal.

And this rest is as glorious as it is enduring. Heaven is a bright, a glorious place. It is pictured forth to view by the emblem of the golden city, adorned with precious stones, and illumined by God himself, whose glories are resplendent, and whose brightness casts the orb of light into the shade. While the world of the lost is described as darkness, heaven is set forth to view in all its splendors, as a place worthy to be the residence of the King of kings and Lord of lords.

Language fails to express the thoughts which cluster around that happy place, or to convey any suitable idea of that holy

and blest abode. Nor can any mind but one renewed, and which knows by experience the blessedness of a life of peace, form a proper conception of the beauty and holiness of the everlasting rest.

To this rest, the way of peace conducts all who love God. This is heaven; its portals are just beyond the river of death. He who walks in the way of peace till he reaches that river, will pass over it unharmed. He has the sure promise of God, "when thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee." And of all who have pursued this way, none have ever found God unfaithful to his promise. For it is written, for the encouragement of all that love him, that "though the mountains depart, and the hills be removed, yet my kindness shall not depart from thee, nor the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee."—*The Way of Peace.*

THE DOMESTIC ALTAR.

It is something to bring the members of a family together twice a day. For "in proportion as the subjects of mutual obligation live apart, they will cease to care for one another. No customs of society are laudable or safe which tend, in any considerable degree, to separate parents from children and brothers from sisters." All such customs go to weaken that sense of mutual dependence, which is commingled, as a vital element, with the domestic affections. Love must be on the wane in any house, the inmates of which rarely meet together. But in the case we are contemplating, they are not merely convened morning and evening to look each other in the face, or to hold a familiar talk. They assemble to engage in one of the most tender and impressive of all services—to listen, as a family, to the counsels of inspired wisdom; to sing in unison their hymns of praise, and bow down together before the throne of grace, and follow the hallowed accents of a father's voice, while he presents, as the revered priest of his household, their common confessions, supplications, thanksgivings and intercessions. Can you wonder that a service like this should have enkindled the enthusiasm of one of the sweetest poets,* who, though his own worst enemy, could never forget the daily worship of his father's house?

Is it possible to conceive of a service better adapted than this to repress all jealousies and envies, to drive away the gloomy

* Burns.

vapors of moroseness, to restore serenity to every clouded brow, to reburnish the chain of affection, and diffuse an air of cheerfulness through the house? If there is a transient interruption of conjugal cordiality, can the coolness survive the family-prayer? If there are heart-burnings among the children, will they not dissolve like snow in the sun as the petition goes up, "forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us?" If misfortune has come down upon them, will they not cling more closely to each other as they pour their common sorrows into the ear of their common Father? If they are enriched with unlooked-for blessings, will they not feel them to be the more precious as they present their united thank-offering to the Giver of all good?

But I must not detain you with this animating theme. Let me rather invite you to prove for yourselves the efficacy of family worship as a help to domestic happiness. Let it be your first care to rear an altar to God if your house is without one—to repair your altar if it has fallen into decay.

And by this and every other means which God has placed within your reach, strive to prepare yourselves and those who are dearest to you, for a better world. Give the BIBLE the place in your families to which it is entitled, and then, through the unsearchable riches of Christ, many a household among you may hereafter realize that most blessed consummation, and appear **A WHOLE FAMILY IN HEAVEN.**—*The Bible in the Family.*
